

The Book of Haggai

The Author, Title, and Date of Haggai

1. Title: Haggai

2. Author: Haggai (“Festal one” or maybe “Feast of Yahweh”). This suggests he may have been born on a feast day.
 - a. This book offers all we know of him and we know nothing of his family or occupation other than he was a prophet.
 - b. Contemporary of Ezra and Zechariah. Interestingly, Ezra does not list Haggai with other refugees returning to Jerusalem.
 - c. Associated most with the Prophet Zechariah (Ezra 5:1; 6:14; Zech 8:9).
 - d. When appearing together in Scripture, Haggai’s name appears before Zechariah. This suggests that Haggai was probably older than his peer.
 - e. Zechariah’s prophecies occur between 2:1-10.
 - f. If 2:3 indicates Haggai had seen the first temple, built by Solomon, he may have been at least 70 years old.
 - g. A man of conviction holding a distinction among prophets as being one the people actually listed to.

3. Date: 520 B.C.

- a. Haggai’s first sermon (1:1) was on Aug 29, 520 B.C.
 - b. Other dates provided: Sep 21, 520 B.C. (1:15), Oct 17, 520 B.C. (2:1), Dec 18, 520 B.C. (2:10-20).
 - c. Haggai’s recorded prophecies were complete in less than four months.
4. Literary construct: Prose for introductory passages and features of typical Semitic poetry for the sermons. There are a few repeating phrases:
- a. “This is what the LORD says” (or something similar) 26 times.
 - b. “Give careful thought” five times.
 - c. Others: “spirit” and “be strong”; “is mine”; “I will overthrow”; and “I am with you”.

5. In the Canon.

- a. The first of three post-exilic prophets (including Zechariah & Malachi).
- b. The tenth of the twelve minor prophets.
- c. It is the second shortest book in the O.T. (Obadiah is shorter).
- d. Referenced: Hebrews 12:26 quotes Haggai 2:6.

“For thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land’” (2:6).

And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, “YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN” (Heb 12:26).

The Background and Setting of Haggai

1. Historical.

- a. Babylon invaded Israel/Judah three times 605-586 B.C.
 - 1) Destroyed Jerusalem’s defenses (2Kings 25:10)
 - 2) Destroyed the first temple and palaces (2Kings 25:9, 13-17; Jer 52:13, 17-23)
 - 3) Devastated the countryside (Jer 32:43)
 - 4) Israel was to remain in captivity for 70 years (Jer 25:11)
 - b. Cyrus, ruler of Media and Persia comes to over Babylon (See Ezra & Daniel notes)
 - c. By decree, Cyrus permits 50,000 captives to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple 538 B.C. (Ezra 1:1-4)
 - 1) Cyrus appoints Sheshbazzar, a prince of Judah (Ezra 1:8), governor (Ezra 5:14) and primary leader
 - 2) The captives return to Jerusalem; however, after 16 years, only the foundation was laid.
 - 3) Work on the temple came to a standstill due to the opposition of hostile neighbors and indifference among the people of Israel.
2. Physical location: Jerusalem, Judah. Haggai commands wood from the mountains to be used in the construction (1:8). There are no mountains near Babylon.

The Purpose of Haggai

Haggai, a prophetic book, describes God’s words to:

- 1) Energize the people to action and the rebuild the second temple in Jerusalem (work began in 536 B.C. and was finished in 516 B.C.).
- 2) Reorder their priorities.

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Key Verse

“Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified,” says the LORD. (1:8b)

The Message of Haggai

1. Remind the people of their uniqueness among the nations. They were not merely an ethnic group enjoying newly restored freedom but God’s representatives on earth.
2. Remind the people of their spiritual priorities.
3. “Give God the supreme place in your life” Feinberg

The Structure of Haggai

1. Haggai rebukes the people and their leaders (1:1-11).
 - a. Haggai points out that the people were looking after their own relative comfort but did not attend to the primary activity that brought them to Jerusalem (1:1-5).
 - b. Haggai explains that although they expend effort, it is not adequate (1:6-7).
 - c. Haggai directs action to please the LORD (1:8).
 - d. Haggai warned that drought and crop failure were to remind the people to depend upon God (1:9-11). This is not to say that ritualistic practices are needed to attain God’s favor... God expect obedience of the heart. Famine is one of God’s instruments of wrath (2Kings 8:1 & Psalm 105:16).
2. Only obedient action satisfies (1:12-15).
 - a. Zerubbabel, the civil leader, and Joshua, the high priest, and all the people obeyed (1:12).
 - b. The LORD responds with the comforting words, “I am with you” which spurred on the spirits and work of the people (1:13-15).
3. Return of God’s Glory (2:1-9).
 - a. Haggai explains that the second temple will not attain the physical grandeur of the first and the LORD doesn’t expect it to (2:1-4).
 - b. Haggai relates future of God’s power over the nations resulting in reverent honor (2:5-8).
 - c. The glory of the second temple shall be far greater than that of the first (2:9). This is a reference to the coming Messiah.

“The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘and in this place I will give peace,’ declares the LORD of hosts.”
4. The consequences of sin and the ultimate grace of God revealed through questioning (2:10-19).
 - a. Through Haggai, the LORD gives clear illustration that the people, and their work, are unclean (2:10-14).
 - b. God wants the people to reflect on their former sins and understand the consequences (2:15-17).
 - c. The LORD offers his blessing after repentance (2:18-19).
5. Reign of the Lord (2:20-23).
 - a. The LORD reveals his power over creation (2:20-21) to Zerubbabel.
 - b. The LORD will decimate the power of the nations (2:22).
 - c. Zerubbabel, a descendant of David and the grandson of Judah’s King Jehoiachi, in that time, will be the LORD’s signet ring (2:23). Zerubbabel is prominently mentioned in Mathew’s lineage of Christ (Mt 1:1-16).

The Themes of Haggai

1. Rebuild God’s temple (1:8b).
2. Haggai, unlike other prophets, did not speak against idolatry, social ills, adultery, the legal system, etc.
3. The glory of the LORD revealed at the end of history.

Haggai preached and, by obeying the LORD, the people finished the temple in four years.

After leading the people in righteous obedience, Zerubbabel was honored by the LORD.

- References:
- Merril, Eugene H., An Exegetical Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
 - Alden, Robert A., The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets (Vol. 7)
 - Feinberg, Charles L., The Minor Prophets
 - Macarthur NASB Study Bible
 - Tom Vacek’s notes